Part 1: Oral history with Mark Penn conducted by Dr. Michael Cornfield [May 15, 2019]

M Cornfield: Okay, and somewhere there is the consent forms. Perfect.

M Cornfield: And with the prospective polling. Then later, we can zero in on particular issues and controversies and go backward and forward from your years in the White House, as we have time and as you are interested.

M Cornfield: So, let's start with when you met Bill Clinton and how the relationship evolved.

M Penn: Well, there was a kind of a curious chain of circumstances that let to my meeting Bill Clinton. It really started with Bill Clinton coming out of the midterms realizing that unless he changed things, he was not going to win reelection.

M Cornfield: So, this was '94.

M Penn: That's right. So, the '94 midterms and the last part of '94, the beginning of '95, and his previous consultants had gone into the midterms with a high degree of confidence, only to be wiped out. I always joke it's the '94 midterms that got me my job with President Clinton, because he had a very famous set of his owns, very entrenched.

M Penn: I think the second element of what it was that the President felt that he was a captive in his own White House. That the White House was run by staff that was using leaks to maneuver and engineer their own agendas.

M Penn: So, at some point, Bill called Dick Morris, who had been a prior consultant of his. Dick Morris called my partner Doug Schoen, because they had been kind of good friends, political friends on the Upper West Side.

M Penn: They started to have a series of secret meetings in the residence of the White House in the early part of 1995, in which they were rewriting the speeches and some of the images, some of the issues related to the Presidency.

M Penn: I then met Bill Clinton when I was asked to do a presentation at one of those meetings. So, I met the President before-

M Cornfield: So, this would be early '95?

M Penn: Early '95, probably February or March of '95. We had done some surveys. I took all the open-endeds and my role was to paint a picture of what the President's image was at that time, both in terms of his personality and his accomplishments.

M Cornfield: So, were you conducting the polls or you were interpreting the polls or ...

M Penn: We had, we, meaning me and Doug, had conducted a few polls under Dick's direction. But what I did was analyze, take all the information from a couple of polls. You know, "What do you like about Bill Clinton, what do you dislike about Bill Clinton," and create a fresh look at it, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: It was a fairly devastating presentation. I mean, it was a reason that they got wiped out in the midterms. The President was associated with no accomplishments and there were considerable doubts about his personality, his leadership style, between the health care, which seemed to be too far to the left, and $200 haircuts.

M Penn: So, it was clear that I was given this job to do this presentation, because not everyone wants to deliver the cough medicine.

M Cornfield: Yeah. That was going to be my next question. How did he react when you came in and bearing the bad news and how did he develop confidence in you?

M Penn: Well, the interesting thing about President Clinton is that he loves criticism. He loves cough medicine, if it's good cough medicine. Because he is always trying to do better, refine what he's doing, improve, learn from people.

M Penn: You could always see it with him as later on, he'd come off the stage and if somebody said, "Oh, that was great, Mr. President," he would move very quickly on to the next person because that wasn't useful to him. He wanted to know what he did that he could make better.

M Penn: So, from that sense, I think the presentation actually resonated very well, better than people expected because then it earned me a seat at these meetings.

M Cornfield: Who was in the room when you made the presentation, if you remember?

M Penn: Well, the President, the Vice-President. Would've been Harold Ickes ...

M Cornfield: The First Lady?

M Penn: Not the First Lady. Chief of Staff.

M Cornfield: Morris?

M Penn: Well, yes. So, it's the Chief of Staff, Morris, me and Doug. That really was the original ...

M Cornfield: Okay.

M Penn: The original group and I'm trying to remember if the Chief of Staff then was Panetta. Probably. But not, for example, not Stephanopoulos, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Stephanopoulos was perceived as part of the hijackers. Not any of the old consultants.

M Cornfield: So, Carville was not there.

M Penn: No.

M Cornfield: And Begala was not there.

M Penn: None of those. This was a counter-operation to all that. Right?

M Cornfield: I see.

M Penn: So, from that presentation, I earned a seat at what became the Wednesday meetings and I would generally pick a special topic that I would give a presentation on. That would show some thought, because from those special topics, I would later develop the target of "soccer moms." So, there were three or four key concepts.

M Cornfield: Can we close the door?

M Cornfield: So, every Wednesday there was a sort of strategy meeting? Is that what this meeting was?

M Penn: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Every Wednesday, more or less, give or take an hour or two.

M Cornfield: Sure.

M Penn: We had an evening meeting, last about an hour and a half. Dick was running those meetings and setting the agenda, Dick Morris.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: At the time we had the research resources.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Doug was doing more of the tracking and I was doing more of the kind of a deep dive into what was wrong. Obviously, things were wrong and you need to develop a strategy for fixing it. So, you need to develop a target, you need to

develop policies, you need to develop a message. You need to develop a theory of how you're going to do it.

M Penn: Now, obviously, in general the group was about moving things back to the center.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: But the general theory was that between healthcare, tax increases and the social stuff, Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the administration was perceived as not the moderate administration that got elected, not the new kind of Democrat, but having been moved significantly to the left.

M Penn: The voters delivered them a kind of severe verdict in the '94 midterms and so we were about taking it back to the center, starting with the balanced budget. Later, it would be welfare reform. Later, it'd be a series of other things, taking into account the realism that Republicans held the Congress.

M Penn: So, but my job was to really focus in through the polling: here's the image, here's our accomplishments. The only thing people could recall was the Family Medical Leave Act. That was it. We didn't really have a slate of accomplishments. We had a blank slate in terms of the future agenda.

M Penn: In those early meetings, we would stake out and in my part of the presentation, the concept of more values-oriented approach. Eventually being more optimistic about the economy and its prospects, so that that would come later. And the idea of moving the central target from down-scale non-college men, which in industrial areas, to the emerging target of what became known as "soccer moms."

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, just as a matter of procedural clarification, you would come in, say, once a week to these Wednesday strategy sessions and you would have had how much poll data? One poll, nightly tracking polls? What would you have?

M Penn: We would've generally had a poll of the week, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: But I was working more on the longer-term themes.

M Cornfield: And how do you tease out longer-term themes from weekly tracking poll? Is that a function of the questions that you put on the poll? Is it ...

M Penn: Some questions but also aggregated and across several of the weeks, so that I have a couple of thousand interviews to really look at.

M Cornfield: In addition to the poll results, were there individual interviews? Were there focus groups? Were there ...

M Penn: I didn't believe in focus groups.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Later on, again, I would do something called the "Neuro Poll."

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: So, a certain point I'm scraping the weekly polls, but I proposed a really extensive project where we basically take a look at everyone's lifestyle. We administer a miniature of the Myers-Briggs personality test.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: And then we'd get all of their views on politics. We would see the extent to which politics, lifestyle would really, what we can learn from the marketing and what we could learn from the messaging, relative to personality types, if anything.

M Cornfield: Wow. When did that start?

M Penn: That would've been done some time mid-'95.

M Cornfield: Okay.

M Penn: And that was a massive, almost a one-hour interview. A lot of the concepts, again, came out of that effort. So, I then chunked that out a little piece at a time each week, so I would get my 15 or 20 minutes out of the meeting every week.

M Penn: So, from that I created a cluster analysis related to issues, to really pinpoint the fiscal issues that were in the center. Eventually, that poll was used for things like where he was going to vacation.

M Cornfield: I remember that one.

M Penn: So, they would wonder, like how did he decide to go on a fishing vacation? Well, we correlated swing voters with the activities that swing voters did. So, I don't think that made a huge difference in the election, but it was a kind of fun use of polling and messaging and actions. I don't know that the President and the First Lady have on a fishing vacation since then.

M Cornfield: Huh. So, how did you and Schoen and Morris split up the work?

M Penn: Well ...

M Cornfield: Greenberg is not involved at this point?

M Penn: Greenberg is not involved.

M Cornfield: Okay.

M Penn: He's never involved except one or two rogue things that Harold Ickes has him do.

M Cornfield: Okay.

M Penn: Come in to ... Sorry. Had a cold the last week.

M Cornfield: Uh-huh (affirmative).

M Penn: Come in and say that we're all wrong. So, Dick was kind of driving the central effort. He also put somebody in the White House. He was working a lot on the policy stuff and we would poll the policy stuff. And Doug proposing that I would work on more the theme and the message.

M Penn: President liked my presentations, so he would start calling me in the evening and on other days and ask my advice on stuff. So, this was a big source of tension between me and Dick, because the way it worked or, as Morris said to me one day, he said, "Never, ever have I taken so many ideas from someone and gotten so much credit for it." A very memorable line.

M Penn: Dick was like ... realized, I guess, that the stuff I was coming up with was really useful and valuable so then I more or less was in the White House every day. So, this went from a weekly meeting to basically kind of moving into the White House.

M Cornfield: Wow. When did that ...

M Penn: Pretty much by the end of the summer, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: That then I was pretty much there daily by the time you got to maybe the fall.

M Cornfield: Did you have to adjust your portfolio of clients as this intensified?

M Penn: Yes. I had to give up all the other clients.

M Cornfield: Yeah. Yeah.

M Penn: You know.

M Cornfield: And this would be summer of '95.

M Penn: Yeah, I'd say starting late summer or beginning of fall of '95, pretty much then. I had two major clients. I always joke. AT&T was one of them. I gave it to one person. Then Texaco was another. And when I came back, I had no AT&T work and I doubled the Texaco work, so that person became partner. The other person, not so much.

M Penn: You know, this really became all-consuming. Again, getting ready for the meeting would take a couple of days. But then also, we started to use the polling to generate themes related to advertising.

M Cornfield: You mean for the campaign? For the '96 campaign or ...

M Penn: Yeah. Well, so part of what had been developed here, and Dick had developed this piece of it, was that we would be able, based on Supreme Court rulings to create the first kind of issue-oriented campaign run by the Democratic National Committee.

M Penn: So, then we moved from the polling to polling and creating an advertising campaign.

M Cornfield: Supreme Court rulings.

M Penn: Yes. There were Supreme Court rulings that now made it possible for you to run independent campaigns, and so the lawyers reviewed exactly how we can run an ad campaign from the DNC, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: We had lawyers in the room the entire time since then. So, the lawyer would go over [crosstalk 00:17:57]-

M Cornfield: So, this had to do with the funding or with coordination?

M Penn: Yes. Because with the funding, they could raise a lot more money. So, the President's image was obviously a dumpster fire.

M Cornfield: Yeah.

M Penn: The game-changing events that would occur at the end of '95, beginning of '96, hadn't occurred yet and so we began an ad campaign that I targeted to the middle of America. So, we avoided all of the major urban areas. We carefully picked out the swing areas of the country and began placing ads.

M Penn: We started with ads about cops, really. First ad, if I were to go back and find the first ad, it would be about cop-killer bullets and measures that would help

protect law enforcement. So, those ads kind of ran a little bit under the radar screen because no one paid a lot of attention to it.

M Penn: Dick and the lawyers had worked out that this could be run through the DNC. Certain things we could show the President or certain things we couldn't show the President. It was all kind of a complicated legal thing.

M Penn: But so at that point, we went from the meetings and the policies and the speeches to meetings and policies and the speeches and the television effort. So, this would later be seen as a critical effort that grew back his support in the middle of the country.

M Cornfield: So, the emphasis on cops thematizes the value of security and the importance of ...

M Penn: Well, it also created a kind of connection between the President and the police, right, in and of itself. Something that really Rahm Emanuel had always been behind, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: And so that would moderate his image, right?

M Cornfield: Yeah.

M Penn: From being way out there. It was good ads. Then eventually the ads would be mostly the balanced budget and the budget fight.

M Cornfield: Right.

M Penn: But they started as kind of image builders and they had one about the Family Medical Leave that we had originally target kind of [crosstalk 00:20:40]-

M Cornfield: And these ads start rolling out fall '95?

M Penn: I think they may have been as early as summer.

M Cornfield: Summer.

M Penn: Started [inaudible 00:20:47] Medical.

M Cornfield: Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative). Uh-huh (affirmative). Then to go back to where we started on this, you're working basically ... Oh, dear.

M Penn: Sorry.

M Cornfield: That's okay. You're working basically full-time at this point.

M Penn: Yeah. This heated up so that from that little 10-minute meeting in March, four months later I was working full-time.

M Cornfield: The 10-minute meeting in March. Let's focus on that. That's where you set up this apparatus to do ads, to add ads to the strategic messaging?

M Penn: Yeah, the 10-minute meeting where I did my open-ended analysis, where I got drafted into the group.

M Cornfield: Okay.

M Penn: February or March. So, from that little tiny presentation, my scope kept growing, okay?

M Cornfield: Okay. So I guess I'm a little lost on the chronology and I'm a stickler for chronology, so forgive me.

M Penn: It's good.

M Cornfield: But you're starting to be in the Wednesday groups as early as ...

M Penn: Late February or early March.

M Cornfield: Late February. And then there's sort of a crucial presentation.

M Penn: The first presentation of late February was a short one, but it got me into the group.

M Cornfield: Uh-huh (affirmative).

M Penn: So, then I was always in the group from that time on. Then things stepped up as I made a series of presentations, right?

M Cornfield: Uh-huh (affirmative).

M Penn: Because I would get 10 or 15 minutes in the meetings to go on about something that would be interesting and useful. I always did. Then it ramped up in the summer when we started to do the advertising as well.

M Cornfield: Uh-huh (affirmative).

M Penn: So-

M Cornfield: And this would continue until ...

M Penn: Well, it continues-

M Cornfield: Let's fast forward.

M Penn: So, fast forward-

M Cornfield: It would continue through the second term.

M Penn: Right. Eventually, Dick Morris would blow up.

M Cornfield: Yes.

M Penn: When we were all going from the trains, the helicopters arriving at the Chicago Democratic National Convention, and I would take over the rest of the campaign.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Then the President would say, "I like these meetings so much, let's just keep doing them." Even though we didn't have a campaign, we still had an administration to run with the same kind of goals.

M Penn: The White House didn't really have an interdisciplinary meeting. The Economic Council, the press people get together, the Economic Council might get together but didn't really have a meeting that brought everybody from different departments together to think about strategy and messages.

M Penn: So, he said, "You know, these meetings, which I continue to hold and refine and agendas of which are now available in libraries, is that these meetings," he said, "was our strategic advantage. The fact that we would spend two hours a week thinking about what we were doing was a critical advantage."

M Cornfield: So, again, we're jumping ahead and we'll go back. But the concept that polling could strategically inform policy-making as well as campaigning for re-election, this is sort of a sea change, isn't it?

M Penn: Well, never have there been the kind of intertwining of communications, message and policy, right?

M Cornfield: Yes.

M Penn: So, I would spend a good part of the time hanging out with the director of communications, who was Don Baer for most of the time.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Then I'd spend a good part of my time hanging out with head of the DPC, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: And Elena Kagan was at that time the deputy policy director, so I'd have a weekly meeting, usually I think it was Bruce Reed and her, and see what they had in their bin. Then I'd poll it all, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And this is second term now, right?

M Penn: Second term. So, although all of these processes kind of started in the campaign, right?

M Cornfield: Uh-huh (affirmative).

M Penn: Because it still was canvassing for some policy ideas. That is, I always used to say, "If a Republican president thought it was a good day, it's in the presidency when he did nothing. And the Democrat wanted to do something every day." Right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: And we believed in issue of the day campaigning.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Substantively that you could communicate through issues what your values and plans were, whether it was the second generation internet or whether it was drug-free school areas or whether it was more funding for economics. So, we'd go searching for policies that would be consistent with the message, consistent with the philosophy and that could be rolled out.

M Penn: And it would be polled and typically presented at the meeting. Then, of course, as the meetings got a kind of a cachet, then people would approach the rest and say, "Hey, I've got this idea. Can you put it in the polling?" Because then when you've got the State of the Union was the mother of all issue spread-sheets.

M Cornfield: Right.

M Penn: So, we'd poll 100 or 150 different policy issues.

M Cornfield: And you were doing this starting in '97?

M Penn: Pretty much the-

M Cornfield: I mean the State of the Union part of.

M Penn: State of the Union starting in '96.

M Cornfield: Oh, so it '96.

M Penn: '95, it was a little bit that really Doug and Dick did.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: But then from '96 on, we have full process that would be running. One year, one of the advisors didn't like the idea that there was so much polling involved in this, and so she tried to do it without the polling. It was such a mess, but then even she recognized that the polling didn't decide things, but it gave people a framework, right?

M Cornfield: Yeah. Informed.

M Penn: And we had formula called "D + i - R," that we would score every issue by that.

M Cornfield: D + i, so Democrats, independents and Republicans?

M Penn: D + i - R.

M Cornfield: Right.

M Penn: So, we would find those issues that Democrats and independents liked but Republicans didn't. That meant the Republicans couldn't join in it and it was a way of pulling independents over and leaving the Republicans behind. As opposed to if you found something that everybody liked. Right? Chicken in every pot.

M Cornfield: Right.

M Penn: Chicken in every pot, Republicans could say, "I'm for a chicken in every pot, too." But if you found an issue that independents went with but Republicans couldn't, then that was kind of [crosstalk 00:28:11]-

M Cornfield: So, was this a campaign season formula or did this continue into the second term as you made policy?

M Penn: That continued throughout.

M Cornfield: Uh-huh (affirmative). Uh-huh (affirmative). Just so I can bracket this in my head, you stayed full-time in the White House until when?

M Penn: Till the end of the administration.

M Cornfield: Wow. Okay. We got a lot to cover.

M Penn: I think that the last day was memorable. Finally, I left on January 19th.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Figuring what could go wrong.

M Cornfield: Marc Rich.

M Penn: What could go wrong? The President actually tried to reach me on the commercial plane that I was on and they didn't put the call through.

M Cornfield: No kidding.

M Penn: And what was he trying to reach me about? He wanted my advice on the Marc Rich, because when I arrived in California, I spoke to him and it was too late. He'd already taken the decision.

M Penn: So, I don't know what I would've said, but the President would always have a way of things I didn't know about, of describing it all to me and getting my take on it. Then he would just, you know, it was input to him. That's what being an advisor was, right?

M Cornfield: Right. Right. Right. Okay. So, budget. How much at the start did you have to do your polls and did this increase and with the Supreme Court decisions and the complex arranging with DNC, how much was being spent on these polls?

M Penn: I don't remember during the campaign period, obviously the media. We weren't paying for the media but we would help write it and working with Squier and his team.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: So, they did all the media. But we had a budget eventually with the DNC of about two million a year for doing basically 600-, 800-interview poll a week. And a bunch of polling.

M Cornfield: That started in '95?

M Penn: Well, after we [crosstalk 00:30:35]-

M Cornfield: Did that start after that March meeting or is this-

M Penn: I couldn't you what the budget was during the campaign.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Because I had polls going in 50. No, I wouldn't have them in 50. I had them going in 35 states. By the end of the campaign, I was running all of the polling for a massive campaign.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: So, somewhere on the sheets. I couldn't tell you, but because it wasn't White House polling. It was the entire campaign polling apparatus. And unlike today, where people use data science or whatever, I was very ... How should I say? I had the state polls, I had national polls, I had a model of the Electoral College, I had a model of public opinion and I had a model of what happens where the next marginal movement would be.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: So, if it went from 48 to 49, what state or states would likely flip over, based on their demographic composition? And the model had to balance. If my state polls showed one thing and my national polls something else, I had to solve the problem.

M Penn: So, this was used for targeting of all the media, all of the visits, because we were able to figure out for each and every place. Had this great program: Places No President Had Ever Been Before. Because, like when you go to a place in the country that the President's never been, they start following it. Like the plane is a half-hour out and they're all ready, the entire town, you know.

M Cornfield: What would be an example?

M Penn: I'd have to go back [crosstalk 00:32:25]-

M Cornfield: I can go look that up.

M Penn: ... the exact [inaudible 00:32:28] was. And we'd deliberately plan a certain amount of places no president had ever been because it would just create so much dominance of the media in the area.

M Penn: But I had these books for each and every state, each and every target, each and every dollar of each and every [inaudible 00:32:42]. And this polling apparatus and the double-checking, which is why on the final flight coming back from the Dakotas, I don't remember whether it was South or North Dakota, the President asked me how it was going to come out.

M Penn: I'd just calculated that Ralph Nader was probably going to get too many votes in California for him to get 50. So, he said in front of everybody on the whole plane, "Well, how's it going to come out?" I said, "Well, it's going to be 49, 41." You could see he was really disappointed because he really wanted 50.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: I was going to tell him that kind of quietly and he had just caught me as I had finished calculating that. But my point being, in order to accurately project what's going on in the nation in a system as complex as a presidential race, you

need to be able to identify factors as small but significant, let's say the Nader vote.

M Penn: I look at people missed the Cuban vote in Florida, for example. Then in the last election a similar. They tend to think that with the surface overall analysis, that they really could reconcile all of these different inputs.

M Penn: So, in many ways I had a really high degree of confidence in what was built and it was spot-on. But then after the campaign, we didn't have that kind of apparatus.

M Cornfield: Right.

M Penn: We focused on national polls, one a week. Two or three extensive polls for the State of the Union. We were no longer building Electoral College models and things like that. We generally had a budget of about two million a year.

M Cornfield: Okay. So, the budget during the campaign year was probably larger than two million?

M Penn: Correct. Yeah. I have no idea what it really was in retrospect.

M Cornfield: Right. But in the second term, you had basically two million a year. And how many people did you have working under you or with you?

M Penn: It was a pretty ... I'll have to go think about that, because ...

M Cornfield: Okay.

M Penn: Because it was me and then actually Joel Benenson during the campaign was the number two person.

M Cornfield: Really? I didn't know that.

M Penn: Yes, because he doesn't put him in his resume. He says, "I worked for the Clintons," but he never met the Clintons in that period. He was the number two person I would kind of go through.

M Penn: It's funny. It's so much I remember doing these things that I don't really think about. On a campaign, like the last 100 days of the campaign, we're polling every day.

M Penn: So, Benenson would've been number two. Then he would've had one or two people in processing. Then, of course, we had a phone bank and kind of an operation. But pretty much, I was alone out there putting together a lot of materials and feeding it back and forth.

M Penn: So, we would lock the poll, like at 6:00 and then I would get results around midnight.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: And then we'd have a 7:00 AM message call. So, at 7:00 AM, I had to go through the results of what we were finding relative to the advertising, the message or whatever event had occurred. So, it's hard to get to sleep.

M Penn: It was even with the same operation we did for the Hillary campaign, but then Joel was off at that point. So, Joel got tremendous training because of the whole system of the way we would frame the issues.

M Penn: I try to do this in the Harvard/Harris poll. We did really detailed polling about issues as though they mattered. Okay?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: And a lot of pollsters and a lot of people think that, "Well, whether you can keep your own doctor or not keep your own doctor or you can get dental care," they think that they don't matter.

M Penn: But every one of these little features of policy really kind of help shape opinion. So, we would really get much more detailed in terms of policy polling. And if you roll through the agendas, I think that's pretty obvious.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: It's not just, "Who do you like?"

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. Well, I hope at some point, maybe in preparation for a later session, I can get one of these polls.

M Penn: Well, you can have the book, right?

M Cornfield: Okay.

M Penn: The books.

M Cornfield: Uh-huh (affirmative). That'd be great.

M Penn: Because the-

M Cornfield: Then I'll pick one out and then we can walk through because the details are what matter, right?

M Penn: Right. So, when I ran the meetings, I created ... Dick originally started with a really rough agenda.

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: Then I created a more formal agenda and through time, and so the meeting agenda would be my record of the meeting and what we discussed or what we couldn't have discussed or what I pulled out in the relevant sections.

M Cornfield: Okay. So, there's much more than is in the appendix to his book. You remember his book? He had like the last 200 pages of his book, he had all of these memos. But that's really just, it's the surface.

M Penn: No. Let me just, because you should-

M Cornfield: Okay. I'll pause it.

M Cornfield: Okay. Soccer moms.

M Penn: Right. Okay.

M Cornfield: Take me through the formation of the concept, or the discovery, and tell me what's historic about it.

M Penn: I think you kind of started it off with this notion of, like the Democratic Party is doing something wrong. And in fact-

M Cornfield: When are we?

M Penn: We are probably early summer of '95, right?

M Cornfield: Okay.

M Penn: This is when we're doing this kind of in-depth analysis. So, if you're going to run a campaign, you need a theme. I needed a bio, generally, or in a re-election you need a record. You need issues. You need a contrast with your opponent and you need a target.

M Penn: And targets are not just about, "Oh, we're going to send more flyers to Ohio." Targeting in the modern world means we're going to use a certain languages, certain people in the ads, and actually we're going to focus on certain policies.

M Penn: The implications of the targets are much greater than expected. We're looking at a framework where Democrats were solidly behind certain policies because their target had been these down-scale, non-college, manufacturing sector men. I'm going, "Look. If we're going to win the campaign, when you look at the demographics and changing America, that is not the unmoored political group."

M Penn: The unmoored, new political group that was developing was that women were going to the workforce. They were separated from their children. They now needed a new set of policies to help them with their families.

M Penn: And they had a whole new set of concerns that they never had when they were not in the workforce and with their kids, picked them up from school. It's totally different from when they needed daycare.

M Penn: They needed to get through the day. They needed to worry about kids being alone, the influence of media, video games, pornography. All of those concerns. Cigarette smoking or start of the teen years.

M Penn: They used to say these parents did not want any more government in their lives, but they wanted some more government in their kids' lives. Because they weren't there.

M Cornfield: So, you're defining them by their worries and their anxieties. And you're going to speak to that, right?

M Penn: Correct. Because, well, first we're going to say, "You know what? The old target, they're not making any more of those voters any more. That's not where the central battle is going to be."

M Penn: The fastest growing voters at that time in the mid-'90s were women, more going to college than ever before, more going to workforce than ever before. Still, age of first child hadn't been pushed back as much as it's been pushed back now.

M Penn: And that no one was really speaking to them. No one was identifying that they had a whole new set of concerns and worries that 15 years earlier you wouldn't have bothered with because they didn't exist.

M Penn: So, finding that nugget in the data and in the new information and saying, "Let's stop targeting just this group. Let's shift the target." I think Newsweek actually coined the word, "soccer mom."

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: We coined the concept of going after women in the workforce now, separated from their children, facing a whole new set of issues in their lives. Whether it's Family and Medical Leave, as something that the President did do and could now build on, to the whole initiative about tobacco and smoking, would be primarily aimed at soccer moms worried about their kids.

M Cornfield: So, from an operational standpoint, the process of identifying these concerns in a big population segment and then designing messages and policies for them,

did anybody do this before you with another segment of the population? Or from a process standpoint, is this an innovation?

M Penn: Well, from a process standpoint it's an innovation because we moved the central target of the Administration and the Democratic Party and I don't know that that had been done before or by whom. It certainly was an innovation to do it by an analysis of trends and polling, right?

M Cornfield: Yeah. Yeah.

M Penn: So, in the analysis of trends by polling, we were moving-

M Cornfield: When you say it'd never been done before, is that just on the Democratic side or as far as you know ...

M Penn: I don't know what Wirthlin might've done on the Republican side, right?

M Cornfield: Yeah.

M Penn: So, if you'd look at a similar phenomenon, it might've been the identification of the silent majority for Reagan.

M Cornfield: That's what I was thinking.

M Penn: Right?

M Cornfield: Yeah. Well, I mean, that was with Nixon, right?

M Penn: [crosstalk 00:44:39] right? Nixon. So, that was a similar twist from the traditional kind of Republican voter to competing in a Democratic ... Well, remember suburban women physically voted heavily Republican. Much more so than people realize.

M Cornfield: Yeah. There's a bit in this book about how in the Nixon and then the Bush Administrations. The Republican really. I mean, the Reagan. They really figured on a silent majority.

M Penn: I think that's right. [crosstalk 00:45:16].

M Cornfield: And silent majority isn't as descriptive as soccer moms. It's just-

M Penn: Well, and it didn't have marketing. The soccer moms had a lot of implications. People would come to identify themselves as soccer moms.

M Cornfield: Yes.

M Penn: It would create a category. It would create a marketing phenomenon because then the companies would look at that.

M Cornfield: Right. Right. Right. Silent majority is about Vietnam and other things and it's not really a marketing category.

M Cornfield: Okay. So that and then are there other in '95, '96, are there other crucial voter population categories comparable, maybe not as influential in the election outcome, but comparable because you've built this into-

M Penn: Well, the other main-

M Cornfield: ... quite an enterprise.

M Penn: ... the other main concept, which became vernacular in the White House, was swing one and swing two. So, the electorate was divided into base Clinton, swing one, swing two, base Dole. Right?

M Cornfield: Dole. Uh-huh (affirmative).

M Penn: Swing one voters didn't have ... and they'd be identified by what their strength of support would be for voting for Clinton versus Dole.

M Penn: Then when you look at them, swing voters were by and large Democratic voters who would support expansion of healthcare, education, more spending on domestic priorities, pretty much. And so they would have personal reservations about the Clintons. They'd be more likely to be accepting of the policy, less likely to be accepting of the Clintons.

M Cornfield: Okay. So, we're out of time.

M Penn: I'll finish this one.

M Cornfield: Sure.

M Penn: And then swing two voters, they liked more healthcare, education, et cetera too, but only in the context of fiscal responsibility. So, they had a very sharp, kind of Ross Perot-like streak in them, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: So, we put together an electoral model of, well, I think we can get 60%. We could get 80 or 90% of our base. We can get 60% of the swing one. We could get 30% of the swing two and 5 or 10% of the Dole base. Because people are not perfect.

M Penn: But a lot of the policies, outside of the soccer moms, was ... and they were swing two, so when you would see something like tougher penalties for child support, classic swing two policy, right?

M Cornfield: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

M Penn: The one hand it helped mothers with children. On the other hand, it had a clear hammer, if you didn't pay. It had a responsibility hammer. You didn't pay your childcare, you were going to be in big trouble. That's what the swing two voters wanted. The swing two voters would give permission for social spending as long as there was an element of responsibility.

M Penn: And it became vernacular to the White House: "Oh, that's swing two."

M Cornfield: So, when I go find this book for the Clinton years, will I see swing one and swing two defined?

M Penn: You will see lots of polls analyzed by swing voters [crosstalk 00:48:56]-

M Cornfield: Well, that's where we'll pick up next time.

M Penn: Great. Thank you.

M Cornfield: Thank you. That's fun.

M Penn: Well, it's ...